

Workgroup Meeting of the Cook Inlet Subarea PPOR Workgroup

November 1, 2006
Homer City Council Chambers
491 E. Pioneer Ave.
Homer, Alaska

Attendees

Bill Abbott, PWSRCAC
Robert Archibald, Public
John Bauer, ADEC
Valerie Blajeski, ADFG
Phillip Carpenter, Alaska Maritime
Vinnie Catalano, CIRCAC
Steve Dean, Homer Harbor
Mark DeVries, USGC
Randy Dowd, ADEC
Chris Ellison, USCG
Gary Folley, ADEC
Dale Gardner, ADEC
Kris Holderied, NOAA-Kasitna Bay
Jim Hornaday, Homer Mayor
Steve Howell, CIRCAC
Kevyn Jalone, NPS
Mark Janes, Nuka Research

Jack Jensen, Tesoro Alaska
Doug Lentsch, CISPRI
Steve Lewis, PWSRCAC-Seldovia
Sam Means, ADNRR
Mike Munger, CIRCAC
Michael Ophiem, Seldovia Village
Scott Pegau, ADFG-KBRR
Ken Phillips, USCG
Tim Robertson, Nuka Research
Bob Sheavelson, Cook InletKeeper
John Velsko, Homer Port&Harbor
Walt Wrede, City of Homer-Manager
David Zezula, NOAA
On Teleconference:
Carla Stanley, CIRCAC-Homer
Doug Mutter, DOI
Ron Ward, SWAP

Meeting Summary

Jim Hornaday, Mayor of the City of Homer, opened the workgroup meeting. He welcomed the group, led introductions, and gave a brief opening statement that outlined the history of Kachemak Bay in light of Potential Places of Refuge (PPOR) issues. Mayor Hornaday pointed out that Cook Inlet hosts substantial commercial traffic, as well as supporting a variety of other interests that rely on the health of the water body. He concluded by recounting that the February 2006 T/V Seabulk Pride grounding could have had a significantly different outcome. Tugboats are not required to assist vessels in Cook Inlet, while similar vessels in Prince William Sound (PWS) are required to have an assist. The tugs that assisted the Seabulk Pride only happened to be in the immediate area. Without their chance presence the outcome could have been significantly different. He and many others feel that Cook Inlet should have the same consideration as PWS in preventing marine casualty events.

United States Coast Guard Captain of the Port (COTP) for Western Alaska, Captain Mark DeVries, gave an overview of the development of PPOR in Alaska

and nationally. He reported that the USCG Federal On-scene Coordinator and the ADEC State On-scene Coordinator are the end users of the decision-making tools that are produced by this workgroup process.

Captain DeVries pointed out that Cook Inlet was the initial area to address this issue with the development of 9 sites by the Subarea Committee in 2004. This project was followed by the PWS and the Kodiak PPOR projects, which further refined the process and the products produced. Concurrently with the PWS PPOR process, the Alaska Regional Response Team (ARRT) began to address the decision-making process that directs the use of a PPOR for a vessel in distress. The AART Guidelines have been used in recent marine incidents and have proved a useful decision-making tool. The National Response Team has begun to develop similar guidelines and is looking to Alaska's experience and products as a model, since Alaska leads the nation in the PPOR process. Captain DeVries commented that the information collected during the development of CI will lead to better decisions, and he thanked the individuals present for their contribution to this process.

John Bauer of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation then gave a presentation of the ARRT's PPOR Decision-making Guidelines. The ARRT formed a workgroup to develop guidelines to assist those addressing the needs of a stricken vessel. The following parameters were established to guide the workgroup:

- Present guidelines for use throughout Alaska
- Identify process for decision-making
- Assist authorities in PPOR decision-making
- Use standardized format for evaluating risks
- Recognize the authorities and resources of agencies, local governments, landowners

He pointed out that the decision-making guidelines are separate from pre-identifying a PPOR. The plans identify a management structure that includes:

- COTP activating a Unified Command, if time allows
- Provisions for consultation of local and tribal governments, landowners, resource agencies
- If time does not allow, COTP addresses the POR request immediately and notifies stakeholders as soon as possible

The ARRT Guidelines encourage a risk-based decision-making process to evaluate the risks of the vessel to public health and the environment in light of the following scenarios:

- If the ship remains in the same position
- If the ship continues on its voyage
- If the ship reaches a place of refuge
- If the ship is taken out to sea
- If the ship is to be scuttled

The Guidelines provide a step by step process and checklists that prompt:

- The vessel master or ownership to provide status of the ship
- Determination of whether a vessel should be offered a place of refuge
- Evaluation of feasibility of a specific place of refuge or grounding site
- Identification of resources at risk

Mr. Bauer then took questions:

- “What considerations are given for Homeland security in the guidelines and how would this be addressed.” Capt. DeVries replied that Homeland security now is considered in all ship movements. Each vessel is required to have clearance 96 hours before entering a US port, therefore most vessels would be cleared prior to the event. If this is not the case, an expedited vetting would take place using existing data-bases.
- “Is insurance coverage for vessels a consideration for the granting of PPOR.” The group discussed the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund, which would cover liability resulting from decisions made by the COTP. The State also maintains a response fund that would also address impacts resulting from a vessel seeking refuge. Steve Lewis pointed out that the State Funds have not been inflation proofed since the ceiling of \$50 million was established in 1990.

Dale Gardner of ADEC reported on the development of PPOR in the PWS and Kodiak Subareas. He began by pointing out that PPOR sites are not “sacrificial” bays or bodies of water meant to contain oil from major spills. The COTP or the Unified Command selects a PPOR site on the basis of its feasibility to assist a leaking or disabled vessel that may require a sheltered location, such as a port, harbor or suitable bay with adequate water depth, in order to repair or lighten the vessel, thus minimizing the amount of spilled product. This PPOR workgroup needs to assemble all the information vital to making an informed PPOR decision under circumstances that will vary with each incident.

Mr. Gardner reviewed the steps taken to develop the PPOR. He outlined five primary steps:

- Analyze the potential threats likely to occur from vessel activities in the region. Use of the previously developed risk maps offers a major aid in this process.
- Account for the fact that each vessel incident presents unique circumstances that must be addressed. The goal is to safely repair or salvage a damaged vessel while avoiding or minimizing impacts to local resources.
- Determine which bays and ports offer the best accommodations for vessels of varying size and structure. Vessels can be classified into categories of large, medium and small.
- Locate the sensitive areas in the region and their proximity to desired potential places of refuge. Seek alternative locations away from highly sensitive resources, when possible.
- In addition to the photos and the maps, assemble the necessary supporting information for the PPOR document in order to provide a user with the

essential knowledge to make an educated decision on whether a refuge location will meet the needs of a stricken vessel.

He pointed that the completed document will be included in the Cook Inlet Subarea Contingency Plan (SCP) after it is reviewed by the Subarea Committee and goes through an additional public review in conjunction with Change 2 to the CI SCP. Although this process will take a period of time, the PPOR plans will be available for use prior to the finalization of Change 2 of the SCP.

Tim Robertson of Nuka Research, the primary contractor, gave a presentation outlining the Cook Inlet PPOR project. (The presentation is currently available online in PowerPoint file format at- www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/perp/cookinletpor/wg.htm.) He reviewed the history of PPORs, the process used to develop the plans, and the content of the documents produced, and he presented the goals for this meeting. He reported that this workgroup is responsible for the final approval of the PPOR documents and therefore the process, form and content were open to change by the workgroup. He reviewed the components and format of the final document that will be included in the Subarea plan. These include:

- The text that will introduce the PPOR in the SCP
- The Index Map
- The Site Assessment Matrix and key
- The PPOR Plans- charts, tables and photos
- The Subarea Risk Assessment Maps

Mr. Robertson pointed out that the composition of the workgroup is created to gather as much information as possible that pertains to local conditions. Local individuals with knowledge of the waters and conditions where PPOR sites are being considered are encouraged to participate. He pointed to the significant contributions of the Southwest Alaska Pilots Association (SWAPA) to past projects and their current participation as an example of valuable local expertise.

Mr. Robertson reviewed the websites that will be used as a primary communication tool for workgroup participants. These are available at:

- Home page-www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/perp/cookinletpor/index.htm
- Work Group page-www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/perp/cookinletpor/wg.htm

The home page will contain work documents that will comprise the PPOR plans. The workgroup page will direct the participants regarding the activities of the workgroup, including meeting dates, agendas and summaries.

Mr. Robertson, with Steve Howell of the CIRCAC, outlined the public outreach component that Mr. Howell is implementing. Mr. Howell has sought additional participation at the workgroup meeting by contacting local media and governments. He will continue efforts to educate the public about the process, encourage participation and gather additional information.

Mr. Robertson then led the group in a review of the Cook Inlet Risk Maps that have been developed. Though initially created for use in developing Geographic Response Strategies, the risk maps do provide an overall characterization of the activities in the subarea. The risks addressed include:

- Locations of Bulk Fuel Storage
- Primary Traffic Routes and Ports of Call
- Location of Nearshore Fishing Grounds and Setnet Fishing Grounds
- Location of Hatcheries, Remote Release Sites and Mariculture Sites
- Location of Spill Response Equipment
- Locations of Marine Casualty Events

The workgroup then provided comments and additions to the maps. These edits, which will be posted on the web, include:

- Addition of a risk layer that shows the Great Circle Route and its distance to Cook Inlet
- Adjustments to traffic routes

Lt. David Zezula of NOAA Oceanographic Survey reviewed charts for the area and the status of data used to create the charts. He explained the data collection methods used in development of the charts. Some data showing water depths were originally collected decades ago using lead-weighted lines dropped off the side of vessels. In the past few decades, though, NOAA has been updating chart depths and currently employs the more versatile tri-directional sonar. He stated that NOAA is able to take requests for resurvey of areas that have charts that are created with old data.

Mr. Robertson then turned the workgroup's focus to developing a list of PPOR sites for the entire subarea. He reviewed the vessel size classification and the typical vessels that fit into each classification. The workgroup agreed to include the original nine PPOR sites that are included in the CI SCP and to expand upon this list.

Mr. Robertson pointed out that the PWS workgroup included grounding sites among its list of PPOR, yet the Kodiak workgroup declined to include these areas. The CI workgroup discussed the issue and decided that the document introduction should include information about grounding a vessel on Cook Inlet shores and point out that, generally, the western side of Cook Inlet is more amenable to grounding due to fewer navigational hazards. However, individual grounding sites will not be included in the PPOR document.

The workgroup then reviewed the entire subarea and offered opinions regarding the suitability of each area for anchoring, mooring and docking of a vessel in distress.

Captain Ward of SWAPA pointed out that Cook Inlet has the navigational benefit that throughout the central and northern zones of the subarea an anchor can be deployed to stop a vessel.

Bob Shavelson of Cook Inlet Keeper pointed out that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is reviewing the endangered species status of the Cook Inlet beluga whales, and this may influence the selection of PPOR sites. This Endangered Species Act information will be captured from NMFS and along with any other ESA designated-species in the subarea plan.

The workgroup identified a number of PPOR sites across the Cook Inlet Subarea. These PPOR selection, along with supplementary researched information, will be listed in a Cook Inlet Site Assessment Matrix, as well as displayed in a set of tables and maps, all of which will be posted to the web. The workgroup will then be notified to review these draft selections. After a 30-day review period, an additional workgroup meeting will be called to reassess the site selections and supporting information and to provide any comments or edits to the plans. At that time the workgroup will decide the necessity of additional meetings to review any subsequent edits to the PPOR document.

Action Items

- Nuka Research will:
 - Revise the Risk Maps as directed.
 - Develop a site assessment matrix and PPOR plans that capture the information collected in the meeting and research additional information, as needed or directed.
 - Add an additional column to the site assessment matrix to reflect ice conditions.
 - Include discussions of ice, pipelines, buried cables and grounding sites in introduction to the document.
 - Coordinate the review of draft PPOR sites with the SWAPA to ensure proper geographic placement of the sites.
 - Post all products to the web and notify the workgroup of such.
 - Schedule and convene the next workgroup meeting.
 - Invite Cook Inlet tug operators to attend next meeting to review the draft PPOR. Include local tug capabilities in the introduction.
- CIRCAC will coordinate the public information and outreach program and report gathered information to the workgroup.